

## GLIMPSES OF VICTORY BRING HOPE

I tend to be an intense individual. Two of my greatest assets are my ability to concentrate for long periods of time without distraction and my commitment to the tasks at hand. That's true of my studying. That's true of my planning. That's true of my teaching. And it's also true of my praying. Whatever I do, I tend to be absorbed by it. Those are my strengths. But with every strength comes a corresponding weakness. In my case, I can be too intense at times and forget that not everyone is built like me, particularly members of my own family.

The first time this struck home was when our daughter was 3 years old. Rebecca hadn't seen much of me for two weeks. Every time she tried to get my attention, I was headed out the door to another meeting. What she didn't know was that I was busy for her. We were about to leave on a long vacation to Orlando, Florida, which meant I had to finish several projects before we could go. But she didn't know that. All she knew was she that hadn't see her Daddy for two weeks, and that made her sad. When I finally noticed how bad she was feeling, I had a talk with her. I got down the calendar and explained to her in 3-year-old terms that we were about to leave on vacation and she was going to have me all to herself for 3 weeks. But first, I had to finish my work. To my surprise, she got it right away. "Three whole weeks with no church people to bother us?" "Yes," I said, showing her on the calendar when we were leaving and how long we would be gone. Her attitude instantly changed. Instead of being mad or sad, she was excited! What made the difference? A glimpse of the future and what lay in store for her and our family.

Bullies. Most of us have had to face them – at school, at work, in our neighborhoods. In fact, spiritually speaking, there is one bully whose blows no one ever completely avoids. What bully is that? The one from which every bully takes his cue—Lucifer the devil. Hebrews 2:15 says that before we fled to Jesus, we were "held in slavery" by him all our lives through "fear of death." Furthermore, even now that we're safe in Jesus, he still tries to intimidate us. For this reason, Paul encouraged Timothy, the timid shepherd of Ephesus, "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and discipline." (2 Timothy 1:7)

God's children are also like that. We labor long and hard, often enduring great disappointment in the process of pleasing our Heavenly Father. Eventually, we need a glimpse of what is ahead to give us hope. That is the purpose of Revelation chapter 14. Our last two studies have focused on dismal news. Revelation chapter 12 pictures Satan's poured out on the earth following his casting down from heaven. Chapter 13 then followed by describing the intense sorrow and suffering to be brought by Antichrist and the False Prophet. But now in chapter 14 our Father give us a refreshing break from the gloom and doom. The message is serious but full of hope. John writes, "Then I looked and behold..." This is the eighth time we've encountered that phrase in Revelation, and each time it's a prelude to something awesome he's about to see. In this chapter, it occurs three times and introduces three dramatic visions—the victory of the 144,000, the victory of the gospel, and the victory of believers in the day of judgment.

### I. VICTORY #1 - THE 144,000 OVER THE ANTICHRIST

The first vision is a touching scene of the Lamb reunited with His sheep on Mount Zion. For seven years of tribulation, the 144,000 have been hunted down by Antichrist for their faithful preaching of the Gospel. What has kept them faithful? Their longing to see the Lord Jesus face to face. Now that day has arrived! The Lamb is reunited with His sheep and the Kingdom is about to be set up. Notice three facts John emphasizes in describing their reunion:

## A. THE LOCATION OF THE 144,000

John says, “Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with Him 144,000 who had His name and His Father’s name written on their foreheads.” Where at the 144,000 at Jesus’ return to earth. They are waiting to meet Him on Mount Zion. That’s significant because Isaiah 2 and Zechariah 14 say that Mount Zion (the hill on which Jerusalem stands) will be the capital of Christ’s Kingdom. The fact that the 144,000 are there to greet Him means that each one has survived the tribulation and are ready to take their places of service in His Kingdom. What a testimony to the power of God to protect His people. Think of it! By this time, half the world’s population has been destroyed through plagues and persecution. The 144,000 Jewish evangelists (see chapter 6) have meanwhile been hunted and starved due to their refusal to worship the beast or receive his mark. But when Christ returns, they are alive and well waiting to greet Him. What is their secret? Instead of “the mark of the beast” (see chapter 13), they have the seal of God on their foreheads, reminding us of God’s power to protect us even during great hardship and danger.

Felix of Nola found himself in similar circumstances while fleeing his persecutors. Calling on God for help, he took refuge in a cave. Scarcely had he entered it when a spider began to spin a web over its opening. Seeing it, his enemies didn’t bother looking inside. They assumed that not one could have entered the cave without disturbing that lacy curtain of silk. So, they road on and the life of one of God’s great servants was spared. Later, Felix summed up his experience like this. “Where God is, a spider’s web is a wall; where He is not, a wall is but a spider’s web.”

## B. THE SONG OF THE 144,000

John continues, “And I head a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.”

Why are the 144,000 the only ones able to sing this song? Because their experience has been unique. No other group has endured the hardships that this group will endure. Of all things on earth, only they will come through the tribulation alive, well, and completely faithful. This makes their testimony different from all other testimonies that have ever been given.

As a pastor, it’s been my privilege to listen on hundreds of Christians share their faith stories, in several different countries. But I have discovered that there is something unique about the faith story of someone who has suffered for Christ. Such a believer not only radiates a love for Christ, which goes beyond understanding, but he or she is also able to give supernatural comfort to others. Cheryl and I learned this firsthand when our daughter Heidi was diagnosed with cancer We appreciated the prayers and support of all God’s people. But it was a couple whose child had died of cancer who gave us the most comfort and hope, that “no matter what happens, God will carry you through this.” Likewise, the song of the 144,000 will be an eternal reminder to God’s people from every background that God’s grace is sufficient for every trial.

## C. THE LOYALTY OF THE 144,000

The most outstanding characteristic of this group is their loyalty. John gives three evidences of it. First, their holiness. Verse 4 says, “These are those who did not defile themselves

with women, for they kept themselves pure.” The words “did not defile themselves with women” doesn’t necessarily mean that all 144,000 are bachelors. However, being constantly hunted and on the run, will make marriage difficult at that time. Paul uses the same term in 2 Corinthians 11:2, where he says to the church at Corinth, I want to “present you as a pure virgin to Christ.” The point is not that they are all unmarried or that being single is superior to being married. The Bible says that both can be pleasing to God, that “marriage is honorable among all and the bed undefiled.” (Hebrews 13:4) The point is at the end of the sentence where John adds, “for they kept themselves pure.” In other words, they are fully devoted to Christ, using all their time and energy to preach Christ to others, and not succumbing to Antichrist and his temptations.

Second, he emphasizes their truthfulness. Verse 5: “No lie was found in their mouths.” What a contrast to Satan’s tactics! Antichrist’s power is the power to “deceive.” And of his spiritual father, the devil, Jesus said, “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” (John 8:44) But not the 144,000! No matter how the world tries to take advantage of us, God’s people fight fair. 2 Corinthians 10:4 says, “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.” In other words, no matter how personally threatening it is, we’re to speak the truth in love and trust God to defend us.

Is that true of you? As Jesus commanded, “Is your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’ and your ‘no’ ‘no?’ Or do you leave “loopholes” in your promises, and are your conversations sprinkled with half-truths and little white lies? “No, tell whoever is on the phone, I’m not here!?”

Third, he emphasizes their witness. “They follow the Lamb where He goes” and “were offered as first-fruits to God and the Lamb.” The term “first-fruits” carries with it a harvest to follow. For example, when the ancient Israelites offered their first-fruits in the Temple, it was an act of faith symbolizing their confidence that God was going to bless them with a bountiful harvest to follow. In the same way, the 144,000 are just a foretaste of the innumerable multitude that is going to be saved through their ministry. That promise is seen in the phrase, “they follow the Lamb wherever He goes.” For what did Jesus say would happen when we choose to follow Him? He said, “Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men.” (Matthew 4:19)

The lesson? You cannot please Christ without caring for souls. That doesn’t mean we must knock on doors or pass out tracts on streets corners. If God calls you to do that, by all means do so! But it does mean that we will be witnesses for Him. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be My witnesses.” (Acts 1:8) What about you? Have you passed that test of loyalty? Is your greatest desire to reach others for Him?

***I wonder, have I done my best for Jesus, Who died upon the cruel tree?  
To think of His great sacrifice on Calvary! I know My Lord expects the best from me.  
How many are the lost that I have lifted? How many are the chained I’ve helped to free?  
I wonder, have I don’t my best for Jesus, when He has done so much for me?***